

ACTIVISTS “ONLINE” AND “OFFLINE:” THE INTERNET AS AN INFORMATION CHANNEL FOR PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS*

Jeroen Van Laer[†]

Using individual-level data of actual protest participants in nine different protest demonstrations in Belgium, this article compares activists using the Internet and activists not using the Internet as an information channel about an upcoming demonstration. We find that “online” and “offline” activists differ significantly in terms of socio-demographic and political backgrounds, formal network and organizational embeddedness, and to some extent motivational aspects. The findings suggest that using digital communication channels likely extends, but at the same time narrows the mobilizing potential to a public of experienced, organizationally embedded activists. The Internet is principally used by “super-activists:” highly educated, with a lot of experience and combining multiple engagements at the same time. The article then discusses these results in light of two focal problems: that the Internet reinforces participation inequalities, and that the Internet might prove insufficient for sustained collective action participation and the maintenance of future social movement organizations.

The last decade has seen a boom in digital information and communication technologies (ICTs). In this time ICTs have become ubiquitous. The diffusion of ICTs occurred much more rapidly than earlier technological advancements such as the telephone or the TV. Such revolutionary change has obviously led to important changes in many spheres of life, and to politics in particular (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001; Norris 2001). Possibly more than in other realms of politics, extra-institutional politics features social movement organizations and activists who are keen adopters of these new communication technologies (Almeida and Lichbach 2003; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht 2004a). ICTs, in particular the Internet, are argued to greatly facilitate mobilization and participation in several collective action repertoires such as mass street demonstrations, by effectively and rapidly diffusing communication and mobilization efforts. A recent example was the worldwide mobilization on February 15, 2003 against the imminent war in Iraq. In this one-day globally coordinated event millions of people took to the streets in more than 60 different countries. Several authors have demonstrated that this event would not likely have been as massive and diverse without the coordinating and mobilizing capacity of the Internet (Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008; Carty and Onyett 2006; Cortright 2004; Vasi 2006; Verhulst 2010).

Certainly, the Internet has a substantial impact on the manner in which contemporary movements and activists organize, coordinate, and mobilize for collective action (Ayres 1999; Bennett 2003). However, contrary to the early “cyber-enthusiasts” (e.g. Coleman 1999; Rheingold 1993), several scholars are increasingly skeptical and even pessimistic about the Internet’s potential to “invigorate democracy” and fuel political participation among “resource-poor” citizens (e.g. Hill and Hughes 1998; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Norris

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[†] Jeroen Van Laer is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Antwerp, and a member of the Media, Movements and Politics Research Group (www.m2p.be). Please direct all correspondence by mail to Jeroen Van Laer, University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, or by e-mail to jeroen.vanlaer@ua.ac.be.

2001; Scheufele and Nisbet 2002). Di Gennaro and Dutton (2006: 311-12) conclude that “online political participation [is] reinforcing and in some cases exacerbating some of the existing social inequalities in offline political participation by marginalizing the less educated and those from lower socioeconomic groups.” Therefore an initial problem with the Internet is that, if Internet use indeed favors or disfavors certain issues and grievances to be attended to by social movements and collective action, this might threaten the democratic potential of social movements (Tilly 2004: 155). Citizens using the Internet may be better equipped to express their grievances, and more importantly, may represent *other* grievances more than people *not* using the Internet. In this case Internet use might indeed reinforce existing inequalities among the activists participating in protest actions.

A second problem is more related to the strength of commitment. Earl and Schussman (2003), for instance, contend that the rise of “e-activism” has created protest “users” rather than “members,” meaning that the fast growing support and diffusion of protest enabled via the Internet is followed by an even faster decline in commitment. Because of its low entry costs Internet allows citizens to easily opt in and opt out of different protest issues and causes following their individual preferences and current priorities. But, over the long-run, Internet, as a “weak-tie instrument par excellence” (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, and Rosson 2005), may be found insufficient to create a sustainable network of activists, endangering the maintenance and coordination of future social movement organizations (Bennett 2003; Tilly 2004).

Many scholars studying the impact of digital media on mobilization and collective action have principally focused on how these media changed mobilization and coordination capacities of social movement organizations and alternative groups within civil society (see, among others: Clark and Themudo 2003; Hajnal 2002; McCaughey and Ayers 2003; Meikle 2002; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht 2004b). Only a few studies have explicitly focused on actual protest participants, formally and not formally linked to particular movement organizations, and how digital media might have changed participation dynamics on the micro-level of collective action (but see: della Porta and Mosca 2005). Many questions remain unanswered about how different kinds of activists, mobilized around different types of issues and distinct types of social movements, employ new communication technologies as a means to be informed on and be mobilized for collective action. In this article we present original evidence of individual activists who actually participated in various protest demonstrations that took place between February 2006 and December 2007 in Belgium. By means of a fairly novel protest surveying technique, asking protest participants during various protest demonstrations to fill in a questionnaire, we can distinguish between activists who are informed about upcoming demonstrations via the Internet from activists who do not use this digital medium. The central question in this article is *do we find differences between protest participants using the Internet and participants not using the Internet as an information channel about an upcoming demonstration?* We will focus on activist’s socio-demographic and political backgrounds, their network and organizational embeddedness, and their motivations to participate in a specific demonstration.

INTERNET USE AND PROTEST PARTICIPATION: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The Internet and other new communication technologies can significantly reduce “transaction costs” for groups and activists organizing, mobilizing, and participating in collective action by changing the way in which information is published and accessed (Bonchek 1995; Naughton 2001). The Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the subsequent worldwide support for the indigenous people of Chiapas struggling for greater autonomy is a well-known case in point to illustrate how the Internet can facilitate protest and the global diffusion of solidarity (see, among others: Cleaver 1998; Ronfeldt and Arquilla 1998; Schulz 1998). The so-called “Battle

in Seattle," referring to the demonstrations held in that city in late 1999 against the WTO, offers another exemplary moment of protest action in the Internet age (see Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Juris 2005; Smith 2001; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004). Very recently millions of Colombian people took to the streets to protest against the FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Initially, the call for this mass mobilization was made via an affinity group on the popular social network site Facebook. The group was set up early January 2008 and less than a month later over 4 million people were protesting in a global day of action in dozens of cities in Colombia and the rest of the world (Vargas Llosa 2008). As these examples show, the Internet is somehow conducive in increasing the awareness about collective action events on a much wider and even international scale (Ayres 1999). In no time activists across geographical and social boundaries can easily be invited via web pages and listservs, blogs or virtual calendars to participate in demonstrations and rallies (Bédoyan, Van Aelst, and Walgrave 2004; Bennett 2003; van de Donk and Foederer 2001).

In this article we investigate the role of the Internet in raising awareness about different protest demonstrations and how this is associated with specific activists' characteristics and related mobilization and participation dynamics. We will argue that the use of the Internet as an information channel about upcoming demonstrations is related to protester's personal backgrounds, their social and organizational network embeddedness, and their motivations to actually participate in collective action. The threefold distinction between demographics/attitudes, networks, and motivations refers to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) classic explanation of political participation, arguing that people participate because they *can*, because they are *asked to*, and because they *want to*. People *can* participate because, first of all, their present personal and professional demands do not hinder participation (e.g. students are more likely to participate because they generally have fewer demands on their time; see McAdam 1986). Second, they hold certain beliefs and political attitudes that make them more susceptible to participate (Downton and Wehr 1997), essentially pointing to some kind of "attitudinal availability" that complements "biographical" availability. People are more likely to be *asked to* participate when they are embedded in a network of interpersonal relations. Network ties, both informal (with friends or family) as well as formal (with co-members in an organization) are consequently found to be a strong and robust predictor of protest participation (Schussman and Soule 2005; Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson 1980). Finally, people participate because they *want to*. People participating in collective action, at least, are willing to do so (Klandermans 1997). But their motivation, or the different motives and reasons why they do so, can be very diverse, as we will discuss in the next section. The idea that this article is built upon is that each of these three sets of individual protest participant characteristics to a certain degree explains the extent to which actual protest participants were aware about upcoming demonstrations via digital information channels. In the next three sections we outline this relationship building on previous literature and generate some hypotheses.

Personal Backgrounds and Internet Use

As previous studies have shown, a considerable part of the population lacks access to the Internet or, if one does have access, lacks the willingness or capabilities of using this medium for political ends (Jennings and Zeitner 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansbury 2003; Norris 2001; Van Dijk 2005). The result, according to some scholars, is a "deepening digital divide" between the political active and less-active citizens; a divide which is highly associated with specific personal backgrounds: citizens with higher SES-markers (e.g. being male, having higher educational levels, and/or a higher socio-economic status), and with general higher levels of political interest and experience are more likely to use the Internet, and use it for political ends. Our first hypothesis, thus, is very straightforward and states that also among our sample of activists, people actually participating in mass street

demonstrations, *those with higher SES-markers and levels of political interest and experience are more likely to use the Internet in order to be informed about upcoming protest events and opportunities (H1).*

Network Embeddedness and Internet Use

As mentioned, formal and informal networks are key in pulling people into collective action (e.g. Diani 2004; Diani and McAdam 2003; Schussman and Soule 2005). Many scholars have argued that the Internet plays a significant role in producing and sustaining social relations and networks relevant to civic engagement (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, and Rainie 2006; Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Wellman 2001; Wellman and Hampton 1999). For collective action and participation in demonstrations, the Internet is important in at least two ways: by first of all reinforcing existing networks in which activists are embedded, facilitating communication and interaction capacities across diverse networks and engagements, and second, by expanding new networks, increasing the chances of being asked to take part in collective action.

Regarding existing social networks, some recent studies point to a strong association between activists holding multiple and diverse relations, and Internet use (Bennett et al. 2008; della Porta and Mosca 2005; Walgrave, Bennett, Van Laer, and Breunig 2008). Activists, these authors claim, use the Internet to maintain and reinforce multiple engagements and relationships across issue and organizational boundaries. The more a person holds multiple engagements, both in different organizations as well for different causes, the more important digital media become to be able to “manage” these different engagements and related information and communication streams.

With regard to expanding social networks—increasing the chances of being asked—Kavanaugh and colleagues (2005), drawing on Granovetter’s (1973) seminal article on “the strength of weak ties,” empirically demonstrate how the Internet enhances information exchange and social relations by also increasing face-to-face interactions. In turn, these processes help to build both strong and weak ties across diverse cliques, groups and individuals. Strong ties are perhaps more effective when it comes to activation, but it is the weak ties that enable information to travel beyond group boundaries (Walgrave and Klandermans 2010). In this sense the “Netville study” by Wellman and colleagues (2003) is exemplary in showing how the Internet is applied as a new form of social infrastructure that can be easily and effectively used to mobilize for (local) protest. Their claim is that Internet use also coincides with new kinds of participation dynamics where formal relationships in social movement organizations, groups and local solidarities seem to matter less, but instead people belong to more spatially dispersed, loosely-knit personal networks heavily mediated through electronic communications (Castells 1996; Rheingold 2002; Wellman 2002; Wellman et al. 2003). One of the consequences is that, with the Internet, people are able to bypass organizational-based memberships and mobilization trajectories (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2005).

In light of the literature it seems reasonable to expect that *that the more activists are embedded in formal or informal networks, the more likely the Internet is used as an information channel about upcoming demonstrations (H2).*

Another recurrent argument is that some people tend to use the Internet because of the *kind* of organization or network they are a member of. Organizations and activists related to the so-called Global Justice Movement (GJM) are said to be especially keen users of the Internet and other ICTs because these tools “match” their organizational and ideological needs (among others: Bennett 2003; della Porta and Mosca 2005; Klein 2002; van de Donk et al. 2004a). The horizontal, open architecture of the Internet neatly reflects the web-like nature of the Global Justice Movement, a flexible and ever-changing network of activists, groups and communities (Day 2004; Juris 2005). More established movement organizations, such as trade

unions, tend to implement new communication technologies more slowly and often inadequately (Ward and Lusoli 2003). For these established organizations ICTs are mere extensions or amplifications of existing communication routes (Bennett 2003), where new social movements, like the GJM, and the interaction with their "members" may be in large part defined by the Internet (Graber, Bimber, Bennett, Davis, and Norris 2004). For example, ATTAC, which is a global network of different national groups working around debt issues, solely communicates with its adherents via the Internet (George 2000). The question of different movement backgrounds has of course important consequences on the supply-side of specific kind of (digital) information channels. It may well be the case that, for instance, a trade union activist is keen on using the Internet as an information channel, but that his or her union just does not provide any information about an upcoming demonstration online.

Therefore we expect that *activists participating in different demonstrations on different issues also differ in their use of digital media as a way to be informed about an upcoming demonstration* (H3). For instance, activists who are committed to so-called "new social movement" issues are more likely to use the Internet for information compared to those activists that are taking part in events staged by established movement organizations, like trade unions.

Motivations to Participate and Internet Use

The reasons people participate in collective action are manifold and the social movement literature about this subject is vast. Klandermans (2004: 361) analytically distinguishes between instrumentality, collective identity, and ideology. Instrumentality points to motives directed at social and political change of an aggrieved situation or social problem. Broadly defined, instrumental motives are about the belief that something can be changed and that participating in a demonstration is an effective means to do so. Motivations stemming from collective identity, on the other hand, emerge from a participants' feel of group belonging and in-group solidarity (cf. Gamson 1992; Melucci 1988). Strong feelings of collective identity make collective action participation a goal in itself (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). Finally, ideological motivations are rooted in an expression of one's views, a search for meaning out of a sense of moral indignation (Klandermans 2004: 361). People do not solely participate to enforce political change, but also to express their anger and grievances, their feelings of injustice and other emotions about a certain issue or situation. In the remainder of this article we therefore follow Verhulst and Walgrave (2009) and refer to ideology as an "emotional motive." Emotions and general cultural explanations of collective action participation have only recently regained attention of social movement scholars (Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Jasper 1997). In the previous section we highlight the centrality of network ties for explaining collective action participation. But, according to Goodwin and colleagues (2001) networks are in fact omnipresent, and are only so important because they consist of affective ties, emotional bonds, that bind and preserve these networks (cf. Passy 2001).

Since the Internet may enhance the creation and maintenance of social networks, motives for participation may be also reinforced. Through the Internet and diverse online networking tools people can "discover" other people who share similar problems and concerns, thereby developing a collective identity (Myers 1994). By putting reports, photographs or video images online, a whole new range of people, formally or not formally attached to particular movement organizations, can share in the excitement of an action as a result of which support and participation in subsequent events may develop (van de Donk and Foederer 2001). Instrumental motives can be strengthened too. For most people group size is the most prominent evidence of a group's efficacy (Marwell and Oliver 1993). On social network sites like Facebook one can actually "see" the number of supporters growing. Fisher and colleagues (2005) show that Internet resources are crucial for Global Justice activists to stay more closely connected to related global causes and to engage in struggles that targets transnational actors. This proved to be particularly important as activists found that global protests such as those against the World

Bank and IMF in Washington, do not actually consist of a global protest population. It is rather through electronic resources that concerned participants within nation-states are aware of similar struggles and participate in worldwide actions.

The literature discussed above suggests there is a positive relationship between Internet use and different motives. However, we are dealing with a very specific sample of respondents in this article: people that actually took part in a protest demonstration. All the people we interviewed *are* of course motivated to do so, otherwise they would not be there. The extent to which the Internet is significantly influencing different motivational aspects, clearly differentiating online from offline activists, may prove rather limited. Therefore, we expect that *there is only a small positive association between different motivational aspects (instrumentality, identity and emotional motives) and using the Internet for information about upcoming demonstrations* (H4).

DATA AND METHODS

In order to analyze the three sets of activist characteristics across diverse protest issues between participants using the Internet as an information channel and participants not using the Internet, we distributed individual-level protest surveys at nine different demonstrations on various issues that took place in Belgium between February 2006 and December 2007. For each of these demonstrations a standardized sampling and interview procedure was followed as introduced by Favre and colleagues (1997) and further refined by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2001) and Walgrave and Verhulst (2008): two groups of interviewers, each directed by a fieldwork supervisor, hand out similar questionnaires asking protesters to fill in the survey at home and send it back with the prepaid envelope. The fieldwork supervisor selects the participants to be interviewed in order to reduce possible selection bias. A short face-to-face interview with each respondent makes it possible to check for response bias. Protest participants were picked out according to a carefully designed selection method following a probabilistic logic: a rough estimation of the number of attendants is made, which is then turned into an estimation of demonstration rows. In every n^{th} row, surveys are handed out to attendants alternatively in the middle of a row and at the left- and right-hand side of it. A first group of interviewers moves from the head of the demonstration towards the tail. A second group carries out the same procedure, but starting from the tail up to the front of the demonstration. This way every protester should have a similar “chance” to participate in the survey. This method proved to generate reliable results and only minimal response bias (the only bias is that older people are somewhat more willing to send the survey back). A more detailed description of this method, difficulties in the actual execution, and reliability tests can be found in Walgrave and Verhulst (2008).

Table 1 provides descriptive figures and facts and response rates for each demonstration. Appearing first are three demonstrations traditionally labeled as “new social movements” covering issues like migrant rights (Sans Papiers—demanding more rights and legal papers), peace and antiwar (Antiwar—against the enduring occupation of Iraq), and environmental concerns (Climate Change). A second subset of demonstrations is typically labeled as “old social movements,” stage by long-established movement organizations. On the one hand some very typical trade union mobilizations organized around characteristic “bread and butter” issues. InBev is focused on restructuring of a beer multinational, VW Vorst is focused on possible redundancies in a large car factory, and Purchasing Power was mobilized against inflation and decreased purchasing power. On the other hand there is also an old nationalist social movement in this subset (cf. Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni 1995): a demonstration organized by a coalition of the Flemish nationalist movement and some right-wing nationalist student organizations. The principle issue in the Flemish March was Flemish independence, an issue that attracted many political far-right militants.

Table 1. Descriptive Figures and Response Rates for Each Demonstration

Name	Sans Papiers	Antiwar 2006	InBev	March for Joe	Silent March	VW Vorst	Flemish March	Climate Change	Purchasing Power
Movement type	NSM	NSM	OSM	NEM	NEM	OSM	OSM	NSM	OSM
Time	25 Feb 2006	19 Mar 2006	28 Mar 2006	23 Apr 2006	26 May 2006	2 Dec 2006	6 May 2007	8 Dec 2007	15 Dec 2007
Place	Brussels	Brussels	Leuven	Brussels	Antwerp	Brussels	Rode	Brussels	Brussels
Aim	Rights and respect illegal immigrants	Against occupation of Iraq	Against restructuring InBev beer multi-national	Against random violence + in memoriam Joe Van Holsbeeck	Against racism + in memoriam victims racist killings	Against restructuring VW car factory	More autonomy for Flemish region	Against global warming and climate change	Against inflation and lowering purchasing power
# participants	10,000	5,000	2,000	80,000	20,000	15,000	1,500	3,000	20,000
# questionnaires									
Distributed	858	915	722	1018	1131	878	554	548	398
Completed	149	316	98	437	437	270	235	185	126
Response rate (%)	17	34	14	43	39	31	42	34	32

Note: NSM = New Social Movement; OSM = Old Social Movement; NEM = New Emotional Movement

Dependent and Independent Variables

Finally, there is rather a-typical subset of demonstrations labeled as “new emotional movements” (cf. Walgrave and Manssens 2000; Walgrave and Verhulst 2006). What is distinct about these protest events is they are spontaneous and emotional with no clear movement organizations involved in staging the event, and without a clear-cut cleavage around which participants are mobilized, and hence attract a very diverse and broad group of citizens. They are typically organized following an act of random violence (cf. Million Mom March in the U.S.). The March for Joe and the Silent March were both staged after the brutal killings of innocent people: first a youngster named Joe Van Holsbeeck, murdered during a mugging, and second a two year old girl Luna and her Malian nanny, killed during a racist shooting in the city of Antwerp.

General response rates for these demonstrations are satisfying, with an average of 34 percent. The lowest figures can be found for the InBev and the Sans Papiers event (14 and 17 percent). At the InBev demonstration the general atmosphere was very hostile and many participants refused to take a survey. At the Sans Papiers demonstration a lot of participants were migrants who did not speak the interviewer’s language (French or Dutch). These low figures might threaten comparability with the other demonstrations, yet their value was considered sufficient to include here. Luckily, both demonstrations belong to a different movement type, so that for comparisons across movements the problem of comparability can be partly addressed by the other demonstrations. Our dataset across movement types and diverse demonstration issues implying a great deal of contextual differences, allows for a robust test for any general theory and propositions about how the use of Internet is associated with particular activist characteristics.

In order to differentiate between activists that used the Internet for information about upcoming demonstrations, and activists that did not make use of digital mobilization channels, we asked respondents “*How did you find out about today’s demonstration?*” Respondents could indicate several possibilities: TV and radio; newspapers; ads and flyers; posters; family and friends; colleagues and fellow students; magazines of an organization; co-members of an organization; websites; personal e-mail; and/or mailing lists. “Online” activists are then all the respondents that indicated that they used websites and/or personal e-mail to find out about the upcoming demonstration. We explicitly choose not to include mailing lists since these are highly organizationally embedded and “server-side” directed, whereas personal email and browsing organization’s websites entail a personal or “user-side” behavior in the first place. We thus compare activists that are actively using the Internet as an information channel, with activists that either do not have access to the Internet or just do not make use of the Internet. In contrast to most studies we do not differentiate between Internet usage in terms of “access.” Here we combine both access as well as effective use of Internet as an information channel, which is—regarding our central question about using the Internet as an information channel for collective action—a more useful way of measuring Internet use. Our dependent variable measures the *actual source of information* of an upcoming demonstration.

Looking across the different demonstrations we find large variation in our dependent variable (Table 2), with the least Internet usage among participants at the two new emotional events, e.g. March for Joe (14 percent) and Silent March (25 percent). Activists participating in the Antiwar demonstration (69 percent), the Climate Change event (61 percent), and the Flemish March (66 percent) display the highest level of Internet usage. It is clear that Internet is an important information channel for most of the covered demonstrations. Both for the “old” as well as the “new” social movements, the Internet seemed to have played some role in informing participants. The usual suspects however stand out: Antiwar protesters and participants at the Climate Change demonstration extensively reported that they were informed via digital communication channels. Interestingly, this is also the case for the participants at the nationalist demonstration advocating Flemish independence.

As indicated earlier these figures also indicate that the use of digital information channels is clearly not only a matter of activist backgrounds, but for a great deal also a matter of supply. The lack of organizational backbone among the new emotional events means that the chance that some organization provides a website with information about the upcoming demonstration is much lower. This was especially the case for the March for Joe. For the Silent March, which took place in the city of Antwerp, the local authorities had quickly set up a webpage with some basic information about the start hour and place of the march. Still, only few people seem to have found there way to this website.

Table 2. Descriptives of Dependent Variable Across Demonstrations

<i>Movement type</i>	<i>Demonstration</i>	<i>N</i>	Internet for information about demonstration
			<i>% usage</i>
NSM	Sans Papiers	149	47.7
	Antiwar	316	68.7
	Climate Change	189	52.4
NEM	March for Joe	437	13.7
	Silent March	437	17.8
OSM	InBev	98	48.0
	VW Vorst	272	57.7
	Flemish March	238	66.0
	Purchasing Power	125	48.4
Total		2261	46.7

Note: NSM = New Social Movements; OSM = Old Social Movements; NEM = New Emotional Movements

For each of the three sub-categories introduced in the theoretical section we have a set of *independent variables*. In the Appendix we explain in detail how each of these variables is constructed. A first set of variables measures several relevant personal backgrounds of online and offline activists: several socio-demographic variables and two variables measuring general political backgrounds (political interest and past protest experience). A second set looks at the formal and informal networks activists are embedded in. It is important to note that for most participants the Internet was not the only information channel about the upcoming demonstration. For instance, some people found out about the event via friends as well as the Internet, while others only heard about the event through mass media channels. In fact few participants *only* used the Internet for information about the upcoming demonstration. In order to control for these “secondary” information channels, we include three additional variables measuring whether or not a person used informal information channels (friends, family, colleagues, fellow students), formal channels (co-members of an organization, member magazines), and/or or mass media channels (television and radio, newspaper). With these additional variables we can control for the fact that people are using the Internet next to other information channels, and whether these are especially organizational, informal or mass media channels. A third and final group of variables measures activists’ motivations: instrumental reasons, motivations related to collective identity, and reasons related to emotional expression.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

What is the role of the Internet in raising awareness about upcoming demonstrations and how is this related to specific activist backgrounds? In other words: what is the differences between “online” and “offline” activists taking part in the same protest demonstration? We structure our analyses in three subsequent steps. In a first step we will discuss how several personal background variables predict the use of the Internet for upcoming demonstrations. In second step we introduce the variables related to the activist’s network embeddedness, and in a final step we include the motivational aspects. The different analyses are all multivariate binary logistic regression models since our dependent variable is a binary measure (0 = “No usage” and 1 = “Internet use for information”). Because the number of respondents at each demonstration varies considerably, the analysis is based on weighed data such that each demonstration gets an equal weight. In addition to the three sets of independent variables, we also include demonstration dummies in order to control for differences across these demonstrations. This way we can both assess what determinants are most compelling explaining Internet use for upcoming demonstration *regardless of* the demonstration in which one participated, as well as assess whether there are distinct elements between the different demonstrations when controlled for all the other independent variables. Looking at the demonstrations will also teach us something about the difference between and within different types of movements as introduced in the methodological section. Table 3 contains the results. The figures presented are odds ratios and standard errors. A figure larger than 1 denotes a positive relation, while a figure smaller than 1 points to a negative relation. Categorical covariates should be interpreted in the same way but always compared to the reference category as indicated. Asterisks indicate significance levels.

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression Model Explaining Internet Use as an Information Channel for Upcoming Demonstrations (weighed dataset)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Exp(B)	S.E.	Exp(B)	S.E.	Exp(B)	S.E.
<i>Personal backgrounds</i>						
Sex	1.104	.108	1.126	.114	1.161	.116
Age	.986**	.005	.976***	.006	.977***	.006
Education	1.139***	.032	1.160***	.034	1.158***	.035
Occupation (Ref = full time)						
Part time	.935	.165	.999	.172	.965	.174
Unemployed	.456***	.182	.511***	.191	.487***	.196
Retired	.422***	.191	.494***	.204	.491***	.209
Student	1.585*	.215	1.318	.226	1.304	.227
Political interest	1.297***	.057	1.176**	.060	1.162*	.061
Protest experience	1.533***	.049	1.362***	.053	1.341***	.053
<i>Network embeddedness</i>						
Member staging organization (Ref = no member)						
Knowing			1.475*	.171	1.511*	.173
Being member			1.929***	.166	1.986***	.168
Organizational diversity			1.212***	.039	1.206***	.040

Protest company (Ref = co-members)						
Alone	.474***	.191	.469***	.193		
Partner/family	.488***	.172	.483***	.173		
Friends/colleagues	.501***	.149	.531***	.151		
Other information channel						
Mass media	1.252	.131	1.263	.133		
Family/friends	.843	.115	.828	.117		
Co-members	1.032	.130	1.002	.132		
<i>Motivations</i>						
Instrumentality			1.036	.037		
Collective identity			.976	.069		
Emotions						
Internal (indignant, fear, worried, sad)			.992	.061		
External (indignant, angry, militant)			1.171*	.073		
<i>Demonstrations (Ref = purchasing power)</i>						
NSM						
Sans Papiers	.944	.211	2.040**	.242	2.287***	.252
Antiwar	1.497	.214	2.384***	.237	2.355***	.246
Climate Change	1.002	.205	1.302	.217	1.283	.220
NEM						
March for Joe	.201***	.247	.449**	.292	.446**	.307
Silent March	.234***	.228	.469**	.259	.477**	.272
OSM						
InBev	1.190	.202	1.687*	.218	1.631*	.222
VW Vorst	1.694**	.200	1.944**	.214	1.906**	.225
Flemish March	1.950**	.216	3.838***	.248	3.467**	.261
<i>Constant</i>	.112***	.405	.133***	.458	.128***	.579
<i>Pseudo R-square (Nagelkerke)</i>	.327		.383		.386	
<i>N</i>	2146		2084		2045	

Notes: Figures are odds ratios (Exp(B)) and Standard Errors (S.E.). Sig. * < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

NSM = New Social Movements; OSM = Old Social Movements; NEM = New Emotional Movements.

Personal Backgrounds and Internet Use

In our first model we only include the demonstration dummies and the socio-demographic and political background variables. As the pseudo R-square (Nagelkerke) indicates Model 1 improves on the null model (without independent variables) (Nagelkerke R-square is .327), indicating that the list of socio-demographic and political background variables is fairly good in predicting who has learned about an upcoming demonstration via the Internet. Moreover, they also seem to address a substantial degree of the difference in Internet use between the demonstrations: we find less significant demonstration dummies in the first model than in the other two models. Except for sex, all other variables yield

significant results. Thus, male and female activists all use the Internet as an information channel for upcoming demonstrations to the same degree. On the other hand, those activists that learned about the demonstration via the Internet are more highly educated, have more general interest in politics, and have more experience in previous demonstrations. If one is retired or does not have a job, chances significantly decrease that he or she learned about the demonstration via the Internet. If you are a student (compared to having a full time job) chances increase by 1.5 that you use the Internet as a means to be informed on an upcoming demonstration. These patterns hold across nine different demonstrations and related issue-specific contexts.

Considering these results, the more pessimistic conclusion that the Internet reinforcing inequalities among strong and weaker groups seem to be confirmed (see H1): the Internet is principally used by the higher educated, those with a full-time job, with a lot of interest in politics and with more experience in previous demonstrations. Especially the political interest and experience are strongly related with Internet use. Those activists showing up at a demonstration for the first time, or with little protest experience, are more likely *not* using the Internet. On the other hand we see that especially students and/or young activists are using the Internet as an information channel. This result supports more optimistic hypotheses about the Internet as one important pull-factor to (re)connect with young citizens, tuning out from main stream, conventional politics, but tuning in through new participation modes, like political consumerism or grassroots organizing (Dalton 2007; Norris 2002; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini 2006), and that especially social movements should make the most out of these digital channels to attract younger people and make them aware of protesting opportunities (Norris 1996; Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2003). Thus, despite some persistent inequalities, our results indicate that the Internet is an important medium to connect with students and young activists, although it remains unclear to what extent this will also lead to sustained and continued participation once this cohort of activists enters a new stage in their lifecycle.

Network Embeddedness and Internet Use

Model 2 adds, in addition to the variables included in model 1, several variables measuring the formal and informal networks in which activists are embedded: whether they are member of several organizations, with whom they took to the streets, and which other information channels they used to be informed about the demonstration they participated in. The pseudo R-square (Nagelkerke) increases from .327 to .383; a small but statistically significant increase, indicating that Model 2 including this second group of variables, provide a better fit than the first model. Being a member of multiple organizations is strongly associated with using the Internet for information, confirming previous research (cf. Bennett et al. 2008; Walgrave et al. 2008). Interestingly we find online activists to be especially strongly embedded in formal organizations and networks instead of informal relations. Online activists are not only more likely to be member of multiple organizations, they are also more likely very closely related to the organization co-organizing the event. They are also more likely participating together with co-members of an organization. The Internet is not particularly conducive as a tool for activists *not* close to a movement organization, or for activists participating apart from formal organizational networks. The Internet mostly seems to be used by people who are linked or even strongly linked to an organization. What follows is the conclusion that the Internet is not particularly used by organizations to connect with people not part of the organization or the organizational network around different protest events.

This result very much contradicts the "weak-tie argument:" information online does not really travel much beyond organizational boundaries, on the contrary, it very much stays within a formal, organizational setting. Activists that are taking to the streets with informal

company are significantly less likely to have learned about the upcoming demonstration via the Internet. This is a very important finding with respect to the literature on Internet and the creation and maintenance of weak-ties (cf. Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Wellman 2002). As our results indicate the Internet is primarily used as an instrument confined (although not limited) to organizational practices, meaning that this medium does not really succeed in informing activists outside the organizational core of a protest event. Even in those cases where a sheer organizational backbone is absent (the two new emotional events), we see that still the activist with the strongest organizational profile is much more likely to use the Internet as an information channel.

In sum, we can support our second hypothesis (H2) with this qualification that especially formal network embeddedness is associated with using the Internet as an information tool about upcoming demonstrations.

Motivations to Participate and Internet Use

Finally we introduce several measures related to individual's *motivations*. We operationalized Klandermans' (2004) threefold distinction between instrumentality, collective identity, and ideology, which we termed emotional motives. Perhaps, although all information about operationalization can be found the Appendix, the latter variable needs additional clarification. Respondents were asked how they felt about the theme of the demonstration, and to indicate on a 7-point scale for six different emotions whether they felt this emotion "not at all" or "very much." A factor analysis reveals two separate dimensions among this group of emotions: a first component with indignation and more "inward" directed emotions like sadness, concern, and fear; and a second component also with indignation, but now clustered with more "external" directed emotions like militancy and anger. Intuitively, but also theoretically, these dimensions point to two logical types of activists who are both indignant about a certain issue, but for a first group this indignation is more related with personal, "soft" emotions, whereas for a second group feelings of indignation are more related to some sort of group-based anger (cf. van Stekelenburg 2006; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, and Leach 2004). What is used in the analysis are the factor scores of each component.

In general adding the motivational variables does not really improve upon the prediction of the previous models (Nagelkerke R-square increases with .003), indicating that only limited difference exist between online and offline activists in terms of instrumentality, collective identity or emotional motives. The only significant finding is that differences exist between online and offline activists in terms of some group-based anger: those who feel indignation associated with anger and militancy have more likely learned about the upcoming demonstration via Internet. Instrumentality and feelings of collective identity do not significantly differ between online and offline activists. Using the Internet thus seems not particularly conducive in creating a stronger collective identity or reinforcing the perceived efficacy of the demonstration they participated in. That online activists display higher levels of emotional motivations where some sort of group-based anger is the leitmotiv is perfectly in line with the previous section's findings of strong associations between Internet use and formal organizational embeddedness. As research of van Stekelenburg (2006) shows, strong organizational associations are directly related with stronger feelings of group-based anger. In general we can support our hypothesis (H4), that there is only a small association between different motivational aspects and Internet use, but that the significant association that we do find is indeed positive.

Ultimately, we find for each group of independent variables one or more significant explanations of Internet use as an information channel for a demonstration. So "online" and "offline" activists differ in terms of socio-demographic and political backgrounds, network embeddedness, and in terms of motivational aspects. Although the latter group of variables does not really add much to the model. Looking at the socio-demographic/political variables

the model presents statistically significant results for age, educational level, occupational status, interest in politics, and protest experience, meaning the probability of using the Internet as an information channel increases when one is younger, better educated, is a student or has a job (e.g. is not unemployed or retired), is more interested in politics, and has more experience in previous demonstrations. In terms of network embeddedness the model shows statistically significant results for membership of the organization staging the event, holding multiple organizational engagements, and taking to the streets with co-members of an organization. Formal organizational network embeddedness is thus strongly associated with using the Internet for information about upcoming protest events. The probability of using the Internet increases when one has stronger external directed emotions (indignation associated with anger and militancy), but internal emotions (indignation associated with fear, sadness, or concern), instrumental reasons, and feelings of collective identity are not significant associated.

Finally, the movement dummies also yield strongly significant results. Interestingly, activists participating in old social movement events do not necessarily differ in terms of Internet use from activists participating in new social movement events. In fact the distinction between types of movements would obscure some more interesting issue-specific differences within different movements and between the different demonstrations that we covered. Participants at the Sans Papiers and Antiwar demonstration (both new social movement events), are more likely to use the Internet for information than participants at the Purchasing Power demonstration (an old social movement event), but this is not the case for Climate Change protesters (a new social movement). Both for the InBev, VW Vorst, and Flemish March demonstration (all old social movement events) participants are more likely to use the Internet for information than Purchasing Power attendants. Nationalist participants are nearly 4 times more likely to use the Internet for information, whereas Antiwar demonstrators, often hailed as the all-time Internet users because of their specific activist profile, are only 2.5 times more likely to use digital information channels. The fact that people participating in the new emotional events are using the Internet significantly less than people participating in the other demonstrations again confirms the conclusion that the Internet is particularly used by activists belonging to a formal, organizational network.

Following our third hypothesis (H3) we do find indeed important differences between movement types, but we also find some clear heterogeneity within these types. Participants in new social movement events are not necessarily more depending on digital media channels to learn about the demonstration than participants at old social movement events. Using the Internet is thus not only a matter of activist's backgrounds, network embeddedness, or motivational aspects (the demand side), but also a matter of supply. If mobilizing messages are ubiquitous in mass media channels, like in the case of the new emotional events, than the need for an easy online website with further practical information becomes almost irrelevant.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article we investigated the use of the Internet to raise awareness about upcoming demonstrations. This role is related to specific characteristics of those activists who actually participate in protest demonstrations. By means of protest surveys conducted at nine different demonstrations on various issues in Belgium, we were able to collect fairly original evidence on actual protest participants and how they learned about the demonstration they participated in. We investigated the association between awareness online about demonstrations with three distinct sets of activist characteristics: personal backgrounds (socio-demographics and general political features), formal and informal network embeddedness, and motivations to participate in collective action. We principally find that, across nine different demonstrations, activists that learned about the demonstration online, are significantly younger, better educated, more

likely to be student or full time employed, have more general interest in politics and previous protest experience, are strongly embedded in formal organizational networks, and display stronger levels of some group-based anger. “Online” activists are significantly less likely to participate in collective action alone or be embedded within informal relationships. Between demonstrations we also find considerable differences, showing that Internet is not necessarily more applied by organizers staging “new social movement demonstrations” than organizations sponsoring “old social movement events,” clearly suggesting that using the Internet for raising awareness about upcoming demonstrations is “trickling down” to all kind of movement organizations (Chadwick 2007). Furthermore, demonstrations without any organizational backbone (the so-called “new emotional events”) do not rely more on the Internet to “by-pass” the lack of organizational infrastructure, clearly suggesting that awareness via the Internet about upcoming demonstrations also depends on supply-side related factors.

Now, what can we learn from these results, recalling our two focal problems this article started with: Internet reinforces inequalities, and Internet might prove insufficient for (sustained) collective action participation? At first sight, with respect to socio-demographics a rather pessimistic picture emerges. In terms of Norris (2001), there is a clear “democratic divide:” the Internet is used by those people with higher levels of political interest and activist experience. Moreover, online activists are strongly embedded in formal organizational settings. In other words, in our dataset, the Internet is principally used by “super-activists:” highly educated, with a lot of experience and combining multiple engagements at the same time. Our data suggest that the potential of the Internet to reach beyond these formal organizational networks, informing and mobilizing a broad constituency with only weak ties to the organizations staging a protest event thus far has not been realized. Our dependent variable was explicitly chosen to measure the actual source of information about an upcoming demonstration. But this information, in most cases, does not seem to travel much beyond its organizational boundaries. Using digital communication channels likely extends, but at the same time narrows the mobilizing potential to a public of experienced, organizationally embedded activists.

Should movement organizations be worried about using the Internet too much? It depends. The fact that we could interview both online as well as offline activists shows that unequal Internet use in terms of *who* participates is not necessarily the issue at stake here, as long as the issues and concerns conveyed by these experienced activists resemble those of their non-experienced, offline counterparts. Moreover, although the Internet is successfully implemented in organizational networks, people who lack these “easy” digital information channels still share similar motivations to take to streets to mount their grievances. This is shown in the final model where we found only limited association between Internet use and different motivational aspects. Our findings thus may suggest two mobilizing routes: a first one via formal social networks likely mediated through online information channels, and a second route apart from these networks but fueled by people’s own motivations. Even in the absence of formal network ties people can still be prone to participate thanks to strong (but not necessarily stronger) emotions and feelings of injustice. This finding resembles Jasper and Poulsen’s (1995) suggestion that emotional responses or motivations rooted in moral shocks can serve as “the functional equivalent of social networks, drawing people into activism by building on their existing beliefs” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995: 498). However, if organizations indeed rely too much on the Internet without reaching beyond their own distinct constituency, this might have important consequences for the maintenance of social movement organizations. Walgrave and Verhulst (2009) recently explained that attracting a broad and diverse public to attend protest events is crucial for social movements to create a “favorable breeding ground for future actions and mobilizations.”

Still, we do not believe our data suggests a pessimistic picture of Internet use as depicted by some other scholars (cf. Earl and Schussman 2003). In their account the Internet creates

"users" rather than "members." Again, we see that the Internet is in the first place used in a formal setting among (a network of) members of an organization. Moreover, online activists not only seem to make use of the Internet to be informed about upcoming demonstrations. Using the Internet also seems to be related somehow with sustaining and reinforcing particular motivational elements: "online" activists showed higher levels of some sort of group-based anger. In the end this might have a positive effect on future commitment and participation. The question however whether participation in collective action mediated through digital information channels can indeed be turned into real sustained commitment, still remains open for further research. Since our dataset is a snapshot of collective action participation we can not answer this question at this stage.

Finally, we should acknowledge the boundaries of this study. Although we presented a very rich and diverse dataset covering evidence on actual protest participants that took part in a variety of demonstrations, we only presented evidence of Belgian protest demonstrations. Belgium, as most Western countries, has a vibrant civil society with a lot of different and often strong movement organizations (e.g. trade unions). It would be interesting to see whether the correlations we find here still hold in other mobilizing contexts where formal organizational networks are less evident. In such cases the Internet might prove an important alternative information channel for activists to learn about protesting opportunities. Hopefully this article will stimulate others to tackle this important issue in future research.

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APPENDIX

Coding of Different Independent Variables

Variable	Question	Coding
<i>Personal backgrounds</i>		
Sex		1 = "male" 2 = "female"
Age		In years
Educational level		From 1 = "no diploma" to 8 = "university"
Occupational status		1 = "full-time" 2 = "part-time" 3 = "unemployed" 4 = "retired" 5 = "student"
Political interest	"How interested are you in politics?"	From 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much"
Protest experience	"Can you estimate how often you have, in the past five years, taken part in a local, national, or international demonstration or manifestation?"	1 = "first time" 2 = "2-5 times" 3 = "6-10 times"
<i>Network embeddedness</i>		
Member staging organization	"Are you a member of one of the organization(s) that organized or helped to organize this demonstration?"	1 = "no" 2 = "no, but know someone who is" 3 = "yes"
Organizational diversity	"Can you indicate in the list of organizations and associations below, of which you are a passive member, an active member, a board member, or no member at all?" (Summation of "active" and "board" memberships in 16 different organizations, ranging from political parties to charity groups.)	From 0 = "no memberships" to 16 = "16 different memberships"
Protest company	Initially a multi-response question recoded to one variable each time excluding the least formal category. Thus, if people indicated they were there with friends and members, only "members" was used.	0 = "alone" 1 = "partner / family" 2 = "friends/colleagues/students" 3 = "co-members"
<i>Motivations</i>		
Instrumentality	"How effective do you think this demonstration will be in reaching [the most important goal]?"	From 1 = "very ineffective" to 7 = "very effective"

Collective identity	Combination of two questions: "I have a lot in common with the other people present today," and "I strongly identify with the other people present today" (Cronbach's alpha = .768)	From 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much"
Emotions	<p>Two dimensions were extracted after a factor analysis. Indignation loads on both dimensions to a similar degree. The result is a first dimension where indignation clusters with more internal, soft emotions like sadness and concern; and a second dimension where indignation clusters with more external directed emotions like militancy and anger.</p> <p>Dimension 1: Indignation, concern, fear, sadness</p> <p>Dimension 2: Indignation, anger, militancy</p>	<p>Original scale:</p> <p>From 1 = "not at all" to 7 = "very much"</p>
